FOR THE
RECORD

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WEATHER FORECAST

Thundery showers are expected on Tuesday and Wednesday in north Telangana and parts of Hyderabad

Chaos grips Afghan capital, Taliban tells cadre to show humility

Kabul's international airport was overrun yesterday by Afghans desperate to escape Taliban rule, leading to several deaths, after the Islamist militants took over Afghanistan's capital.

"There is absolute chaos," the official said. "Only US military planes are taking off and landing. Afghans are clinging on to the tyres of the aircraft that are taking off. US marine helicopters are being used to clear the tarmac fast before the take-off can be executed."

The mayhem reflects the panic among many Afghans as they brace themselves for life under Taliban rule. The shift came after Joe Biden, US president, ordered the withdrawal of US troops and the Islamist group drove the western-backed government of Ashraf Ghani from power over the weekend.

When the Taliban ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 it enforced a literalist interpretation of Islamic law, carrying out public executions, stoning women accused of adultery and cutting off the hands of accused thieves. It was driven from power by a US-led invasion after the terror attacks of 2001.

The Taliban is seeking to reassure that it has moderated its approach, with Mullah Baradar, a Taliban leader, urging his fighters to show "humility" after their virtually bloodless seizure of the city on Sunday. "We reached a victory that wasn't expected," he said in a video message from Qatar. "We should show humility in front of Allah. Now, it's about how we serve and secure our people and ensure their future and good life to the best of our ability."

'PEGASUS' SPYWARE

SC tells govt to file fresh affidavit

The Supreme Court on Monday suggested the Centre file a fresh affidavit on the Pegasus controversy after the petitioners seeking a probe rejected the government's two-page affidavit that denied the allegations of illegal surveillance as "conjectures and surmises".

The apex court and the batch of petitioners were also unwilling to accept the Centre's plea for having the allegations probed by an expert committee, whose members the government offered to appoint.

Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana wondered how such a committee could go into the various constitutional and legal issues the petitioners had raised.

He noted that the petitioners wanted to know whether the Centre had ever bought or used Pegasus and, if not, what steps it had taken to inquire into the allegations of illegal snooping with the Israeli spyware that is sold only to governments and government agencies.

The petitioners underlined that the affidavit had sidestepped these key issues. "If you (the government) want to file a detailed affidavit, you can take time and do so," Justice Ramana said.

The bench, which included Justices Surya Kant and Aniruddha Bose, heard the matter for over an hour and posted the next hearing to Tuesday. By then, solicitor-general Tushar Mehta, who appeared for the government, has to specify whether the Centre would file a new and detailed affidavit.

Dalit Bandhu open to every dalit: CM

Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekhar Rao pushed ahead with his pet Dalit Bandhu scheme, unveiling more details about its implementation at a public meeting at election-bound Huzurabad.

He said the scheme would cover every dalit in the State including dalit government employees. And members of the community would get reservations in government works and contracts.

Under the scheme, beneficiaries would not get cash. The amount would be deposited in the beneficiary's account. For this, new Dalit Bandhu bank accounts need to be opened. Amount would not be deposited in old bank accounts as that might result in deduction of money for old debts.

The beneficiaries would be given new cards with electronic chips. Transactions made using these cards would be monitored by the government. Dalits can use the money deposited in their accounts for purchasing tractor, machines, any other tools that can create livelihood.

Pawar bats for raising reservation cap

Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar wants the 50 per cent limit on reservation to be lifted if the power of states to notify particular sections as OBCs is to be meaningful. "All States in the country have already crossed the 50% reservation limit, including Maharashtra. Giving rights to the States to identify OBCs will not serve any purpose, because the reservation limit has not been lifted. All of the Opposition members raised this issue in Parliament, which went unanswered from the government's side," Mr. Pawar said. Mr Pawar said a caste census must be held, empirical data should be provided to the State governments and 50% reservation limit should be lifted. "Only then OBCs will get actual benefits, otherwise they will continue to be misled," he added.

Mahila Congress chief joins Trinamool

In yet another high profile exit, Sushmita Dev, former Lok Sabha member from Assam and president of the All-India Mahila Congress, joined the Trinamool Congress on Monday in the presence of the party's national general secretary, Abhishek Banerjee, and leader in the Rajya Sabha, Derek O'Brien. She also met Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

INDIA THRASH ENGLAND

India's pacemen produced a terrific display of swing bowling to crush England by 151 runs in the second test at Lord's on Monday, taking a 1-0 lead in the five-match series.